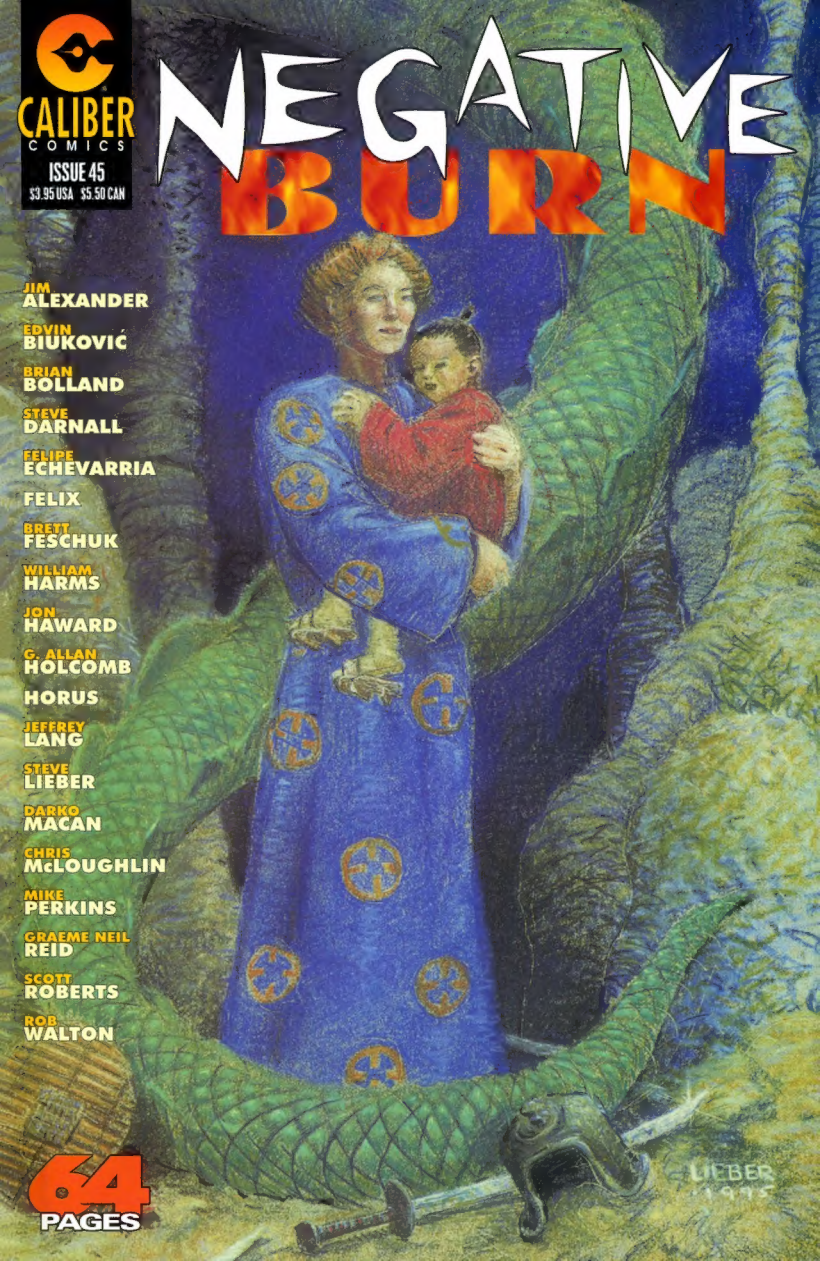
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illustrated by Chris McLoughlin

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illustrated by Mike Perkins

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IN JULY 1281, THE MONGOL CHIEFTAIN KUBLAI KHAN CROSSED THE SEA OF JAPAN AND LANDED AT KYUSHU, SOUTHERNMOST OF THE JAPANESE ISLANDS.

KOREA

KYUSHU

HIS PURPOSE: CONQUEST OF THE ONLY PEOPLE IN THE EASTERN WORLD WHO WOULD NOT BOW BEFORE HIM.

THE BATTLE LASTED FOR OVER 50 DAYS AND RARELY RANGED FAR FROM THE WATER'S EDGE. THE SHARKS ATE WELL THAT SUMMER.

THE SUN IS STILL FOUR HOURS SHORT OF ITS ZENITH, BUT ALREADY THE BEACH IS LITTERED WITH BLOOD-SOAKED BANNERS, BATTERED SHIELDS AND DEAD HORSES.

THE SHARKS HAVE LEARNED PATIENCE. SOON, THE INCOMING TIDE WILL GENTLY LIFT THE CARRION AND CONVEY IT TO THE DEEP PLACES.

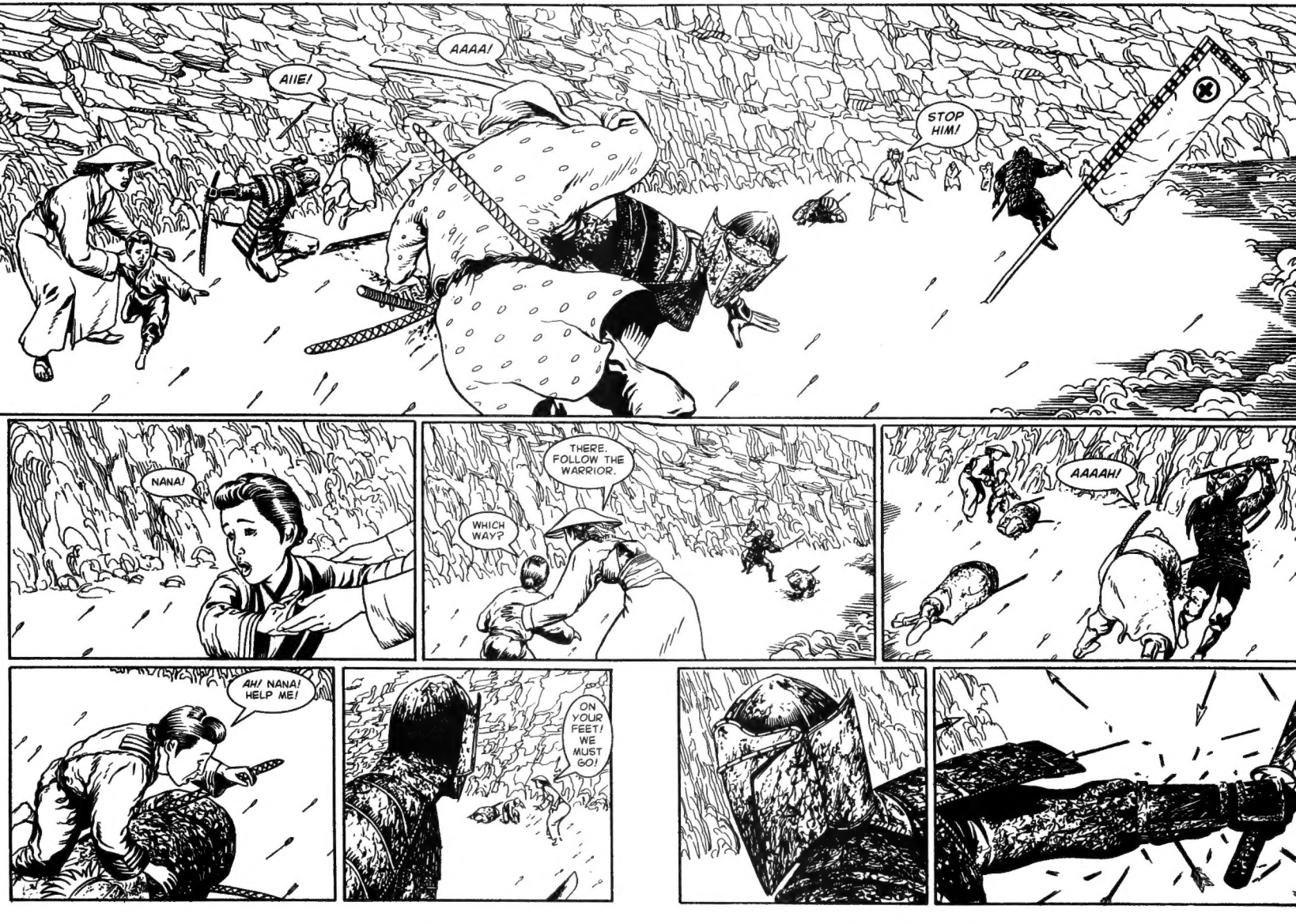
IF THINGS GO WELL, THE SHARKS KNOW, THIS COULD GO ON FOREVER.

Divine Wind

WRITTEN BY JEFF LANG
ART BY CHRIS McLOUGHLIN
LETTERS BY ROXANNE STARR

BUT THE IMPERIAL COURT KNOWS BETTER. THEY KNOW THAT EVEN IF BY SOME CHANCE THIS WAVE OF MONGOLS COULD BE DRIVEN BACK INTO THE SEA, ANOTHER INVASION WOULD SOON FOLLOW.
SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE-- A BARGAIN HAD TO BE STRUCK.
A SACRIFICE HAD TO BE MADE.
AND SOMEONE HAD TO OFFICIATE AT THE RITES.
THERE. DO YOU SEE? NEAR THE SPUR CLOSEST TO THE SEA.
WE HAVE NO TIME FOR STEALTH. THE TIDE IS TURNING. SOON, THE CAVE MOUTH WILL BE COVERED.

I WILL MAKE MY WAY TO THE BOTTOM BY MY OWN METHODS AND SCREEN YOU FROM THE EYES OF THE ARCHERS.
WE DESCEND HERE.
QUICKLY, PLEASE. I CANNOT HOLD THE CHARM MUCH LONGER.
<WHAT? WHO ARE YOU?>
AHHH...
<A DEMON!>


AIIE!
AAAA!
STOP HIM!
NANA!
THERE. FOLLOW THE WARRIOR.
WHICH WAY?
AAAAH!
AH! NANA! HELP ME!
ON YOUR FEET! WE MUST GO!

NANA, I ...I CAN'T! I WANT TO GO HOME!
NONE OF THIS! DO YOUR DUTY OR THERE WILL NOT BE A HOME!
YES, I KNOW.
RUN!

NANA, NO! THE DRAGON! THE DRAGON! I DON'T WANT TO! PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME!
LITTLE EMPEROR, I'M SORRY BUT THERE'S NO OTHER WAY. REMEMBER WHAT YOUR FATHER TOLD YOU--EVERYONE IS COUNTING ON YOU.
BUT, NANA, A DRAGON...
Come now, little one, I have so few visitors these days.

NANA, DID YOU HEAR? HE SPOKE TO ME. THE DRAGON SPOKE TO ME.
OF COURSE HE DID, LITTLE EMPEROR. HIS KIND HAVE ALWAYS TALKED TO THOSE OF YOUR LINE.
IT'S WARM HERE. THERE'S A LIGHT UP AHEAD.
Be careful of the low ceiling right here.
AH, YES, THANK YOU.
YOU REMEMBER THE GREETING I TAUGHT YOU?
And, as you know, I have an extraordinarily good memory.
YES, NANA.
Don't pester the boy, my Lady. I cannot remember any of your students ever being insufficiently polite.

My Lady, as always, it is a blessing to see you.
YOU ARE VERY GRACIOUS, MY LORD.
And you must be the Lady's latest pupil. I hope you appreciate how fortunate you have been young man.
I...I THINK I DO, SIR.
Of course you do. Well, we have much to discuss and I believe your guardian has other business to attend to.
Is that not so, my Lady?
I FEAR SO, MY LORD. PLEASE EXCUSE ME.
So, what shall we talk about?

AIIE!
WARRIOR!
YAAR!
WARRIOR!
AHH!
WARRIOR, STOP. IT IS FINISHED.

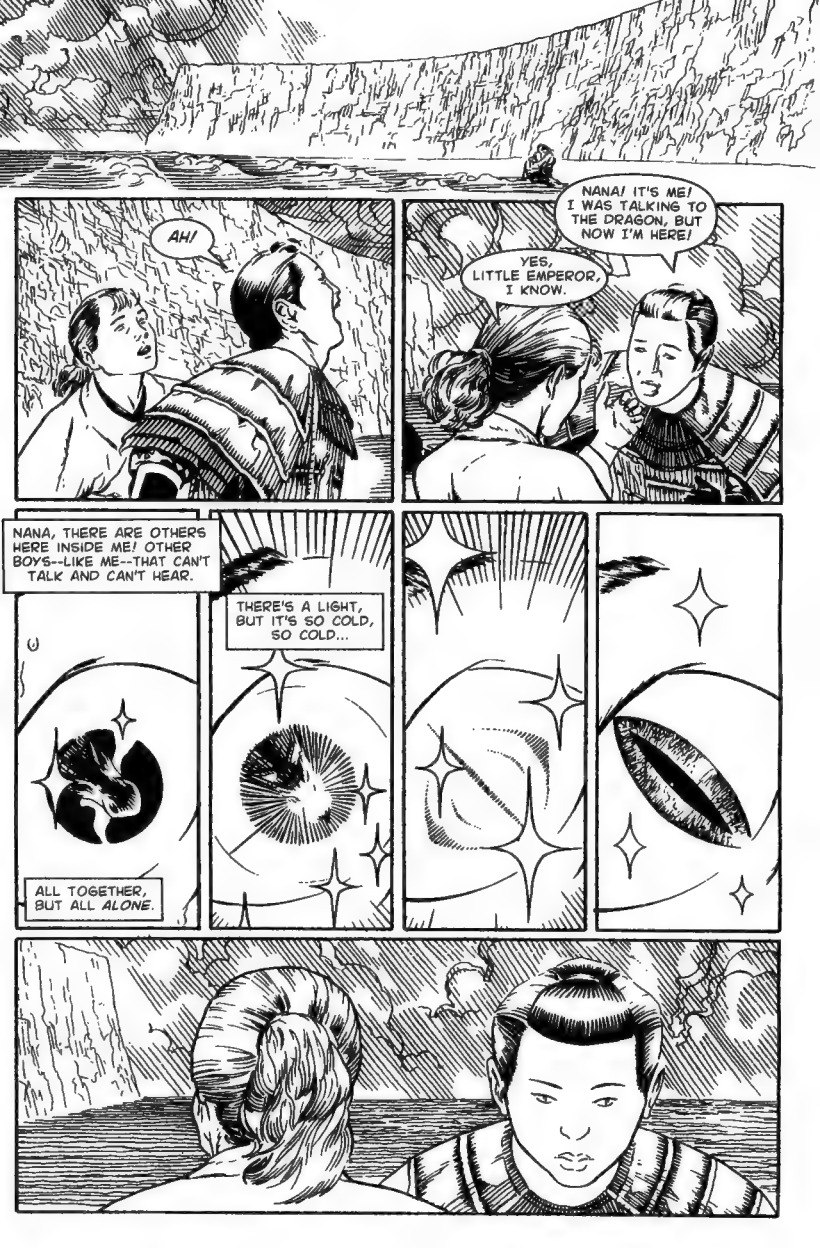
Has anyone explained to you why you are here?
NANA BEGAN TO ONCE, BUT I THINK MY FATHER FORBID HER TO SAY VERY MUCH.
You appear to me to be a bright lad, so, no doubt you have formed your own opinion.
WELL, I THOUGHT A DRAGON WAS GOING TO EAT ME, BUT...
But there doesn't appear to be a dragon here, does there?
Disappointed?
I WAS FRIGHTENED. I THINK MY FATHER WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY ASHAMED OF ME, BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO BE EATEN.
Not an unreasonable reaction.
But if I know anything about boys, and I do, you were also thinking about how grand it would have been to actually SEE a dragon.
Even if it was the last thing you ever saw...

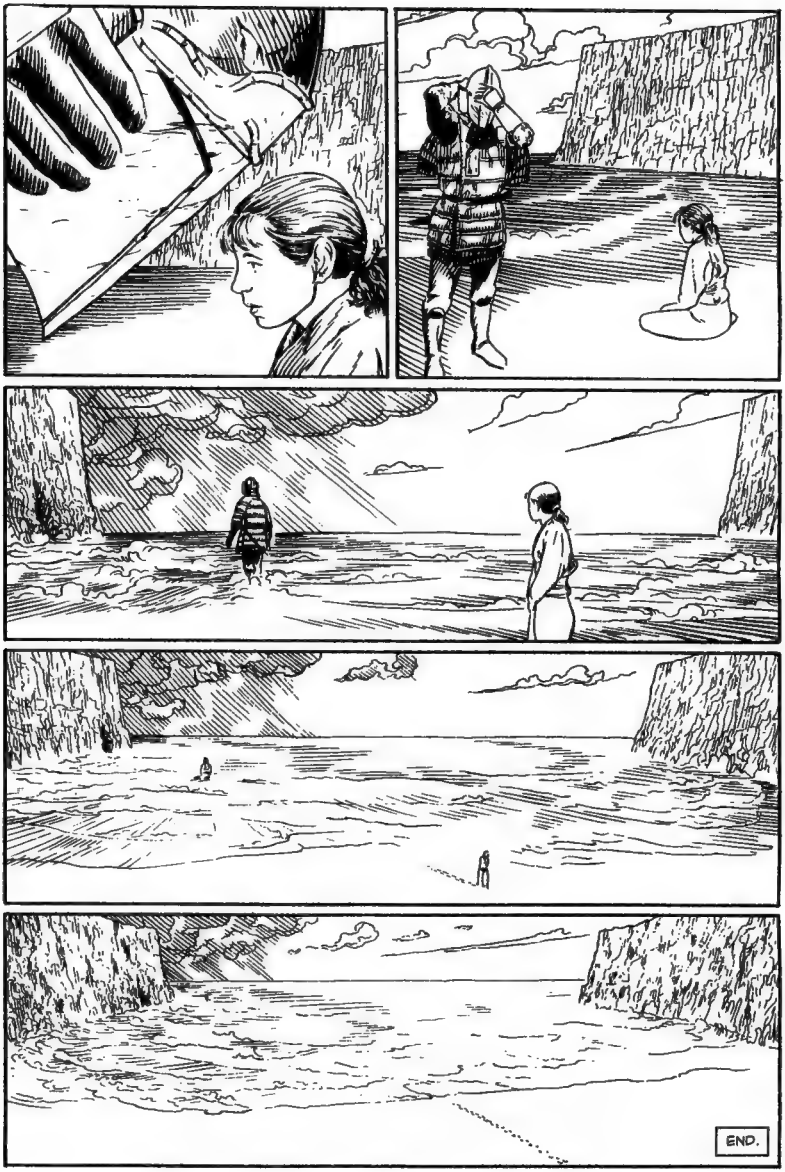
You have been taught well, my boy. Your guardian is to be commended. Now, on to business.
Many years ago, I made a contract with your family.

It was an elegant arrangement. I value my privacy and I need someone to help me guard it.
One of your grandsires offered his assistance in exchange for the right to petition me from time to time. The arrangement has always been most satisfactory to both parties.
I believe your people consider this a great honor--to be imbued with a spark of my essence--but there is a price.
The light from that spark burns out a part of the mind. My guardians forget much that was dear to them, and even take on some of my attributes.
They seem content enough...
YOU BROUGHT ME HERE AND THEN THE DRAGON...
NANA... WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
...and what a glorious life, eh? To be like a dragon...!
...HE ATE ME UP AND I WAS ALL GONE.
SHHH...IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL OVER. YOU DID WELL. GO TO SLEEP AGAIN. GO TO SLEEP.

So, you understand then? Fine, fine.
Well, then, I'll just go see about this little problem of your father's.

AND THEN, ON THE FIFTY-THIRD DAY OF CONFLICT, DARK CLOUDS STOOD HIGH IN THE SOUTH, THE WINDS ROLLED IN, AND THE SKY CRASHED DOWN ON THE INVADERS.
THE KHAN'S FLEET WAS WRECKED, HIS MEN DROWNED. THOSE FEW LEFT STRANDED ON THE BEACH WERE SOON SLAUGHTERED AND THE MONGOLS NEVER AGAIN DARED INVADE THE LANDS TO THE EAST.
THE GRATEFUL PEOPLE CALLED IT KAMIKAZE, THE DIVINE WIND.


AH!
NANA! IT'S ME! I WAS TALKING TO THE DRAGON, BUT NOW I'M HERE!
YES, LITTLE EMPEROR, I KNOW.
NANA, THERE ARE OTHERS HERE INSIDE ME! OTHER BOYS--LIKE ME--THAT CAN'T TALK AND CAN'T HEAR.
THERE'S A LIGHT, BUT IT'S SO COLD, SO COLD...
ALL TOGETHER, BUT ALL *ALONE*.


END.

MR. MAMOULIAN

SIX YEARS LATER...

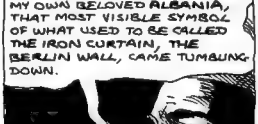
48 Ballard 20·9 96

IT'S BEEN **SIX WHOLE YEARS** SINCE I LAST DREW, OR EVEN **LOOKED AT**, AN EPISODE OF MR. MAMOULIAN.

THE WORLD IS QUITE A DIFFERENT PLACE NOW.

WHAT STARTED IN THE **SOVIET UNION** AS "**RESTRUCTURING**" AND "**OPENNESS**" UNDER **GORBACHEV** RESULTED IN THE HITHERTO ALMOST UNIMAGINABLE DEMISE OF COMMUNISM IN THAT COUNTRY.

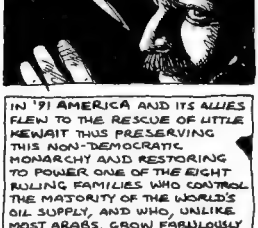
THEN AS CRACKS SPREAD ACROSS THE WHOLE OF COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE, INCLUDING MY OWN BELOVED **ALBANIA**, THAT MOST VISIBLE SYMBOL OF WHAT USED TO BE CALLED **THE IRON CURTAIN**, **THE BERLIN WALL**, CAME TUMBLING DOWN.



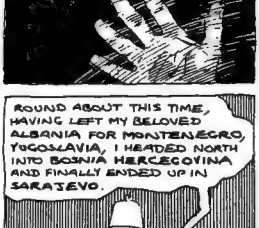
A MOMENT OF ANXIETY AS **GORBACHEV** WAS HELD HOSTAGE IN YALTA AND THE SITUATION WAS SAVED BY BOOZE-BLOATED **YELTZIN**. ULTIMATELY **THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS**, THE HUGEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, "**THE EVIL EMPIRE**" SHATTERED INTO 15 SEPARATE REPUBLICS.

COMMUNISM BREATHED ITS LAST IN EUROPE (FOR THE TIME BEING) ALONG WITH NICHOLAI AND **ELENA CIAUCESCU**, SHOT IN A BACK YARD IN **BUCHAREST**, **RUMANIA**. IT WAS CHRISTMAS DAY 1989.

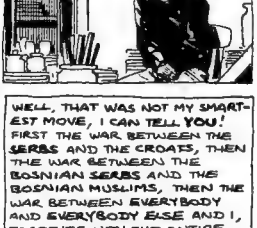
IN '91 **AMERICA** AND ITS **ALLIES** FLEW TO THE RESCUE OF LITTLE **KEWAIT** THUS PRESERVING THIS NON-DEMOCRATIC MONARCHY AND RESTORING TO POWER ONE OF THE EIGHT RULING FAMILIES WHO CONTROL THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD'S OIL SUPPLY, AND WHO, UNLIKE MOST ARABS, GROW FABULOUSLY RICH **SELLING** IT TO **AMERICA** AND ITS **ALLIES**.



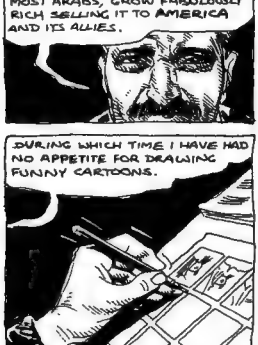
ROUND ABOUT THIS TIME, HAVING LEFT MY BELOVED **ALBANIA** FOR **MONTENEGRO**, YUGOSLAVIA, I HEADED NORTH INTO BOSNIA **HERCEGOVINA** AND FINALLY ENDED UP IN **SARAJEVO**.



WELL, THAT WAS NOT MY SMARTEST MOVE, I CAN TELL **YOU**! FIRST THE WAR BETWEEN THE **SERBS** AND THE CROATS, THEN THE WAR BETWEEN THE BOSNIAN **SERBS** AND THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS, THEN THE WAR BETWEEN **EVERYBODY** AND **EVERYBODY ELSE** AND I, TOGETHER WITH THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF **SARAJEVO**, WAS TRAPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF IT... FOR TWO YEARS.

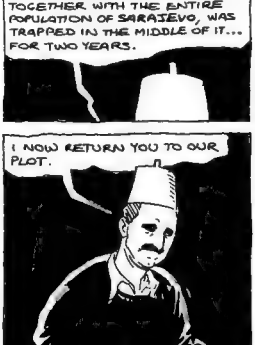


DURING WHICH TIME I HAVE HAD NO APPETITE FOR DRAWING FUNNY CARTOONS.

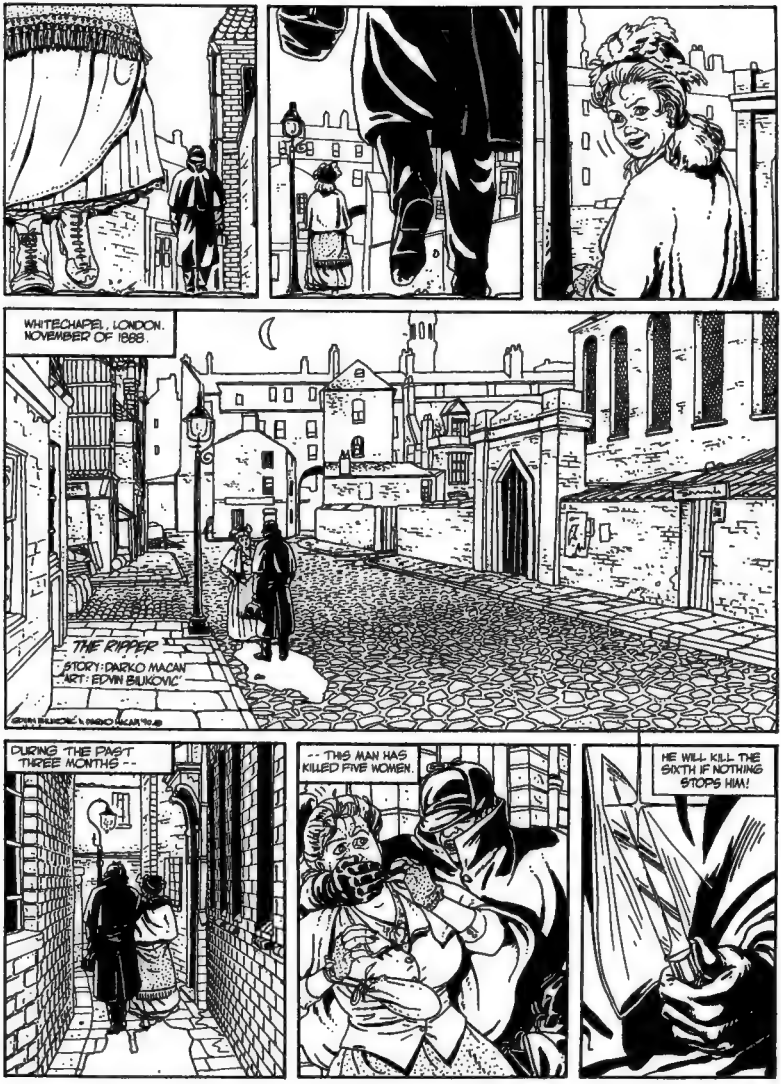


WITH SOME GOOD FORTUNE AND THE KINDNESS OF PERSONS WHO SHALL REMAIN NAMELESS, BUT THEY KNOW WHO THEY ARE (THANKS GUYS. HOPE YOU MANAGED TO FIX THE TRUCK.), I ESCAPED FROM THAT FORLORN PLACE AND AM NOW RESIDING IN ONE OF EUROPE'S GREATEST CITIES (WHICH I SHALL NOT NAME. MY **ENEMIES** ARE EVERYWHERE). I AM DRAWING AGAIN, THOUGH WITH A SOMEWHAT SHAKIER HAND I FEAR. I'M GLAD THAT MR. MAMOULIAN IS BEING PUBLISHED SOMEWHERE AND LOOK FORWARD TO MY FIRST CHEQUE.

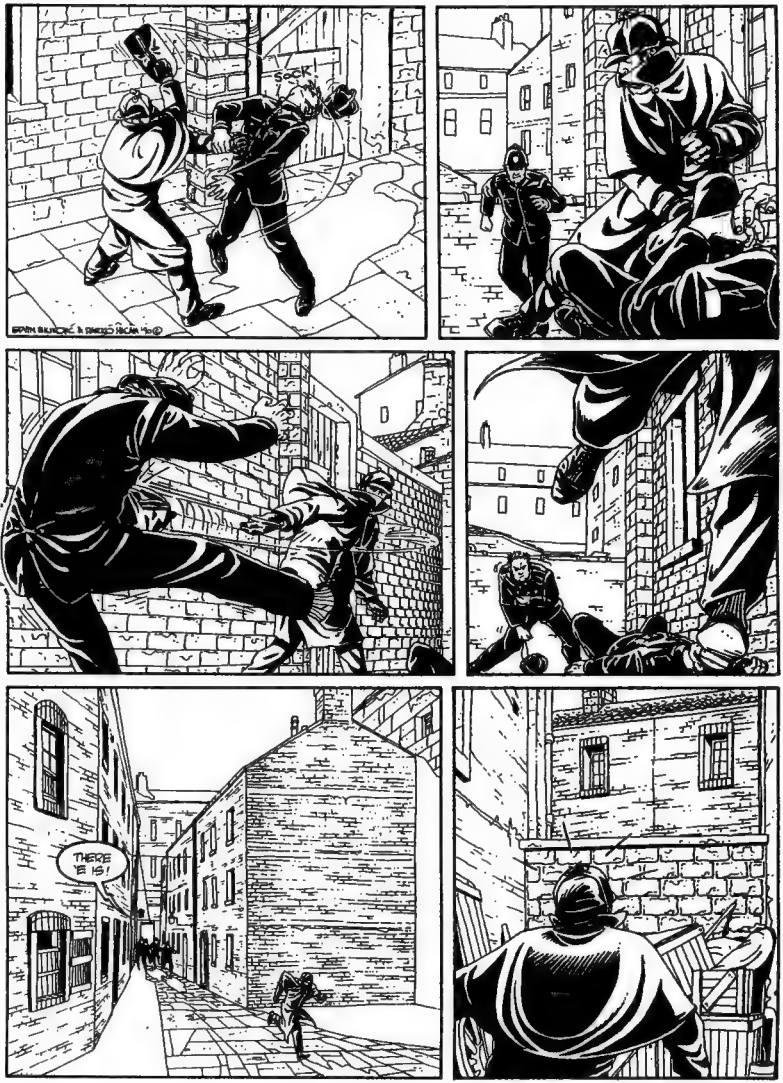
I NOW RETURN YOU TO OUR PLOT.



THE PLACE IS MR. MAMOULIAN'S HOUSE. THE TIME IS 7 P.M.....


WHITECHAPEL, LONDON.
NOVEMBER OF 1888.
THE RIPPER
STORY: DARKO MACAN
ART: EDVIN BILKOVIC
DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS --
-- THIS MAN HAS KILLED FIVE WOMEN.
HE WILL KILL THE SIXTH IF NOTHING STOPS HIM!

TRRRRRR!!!
STOP!
STOP. THIS IS AN ORDER!
WRONG TURN, MATE!
RAAAAHH!

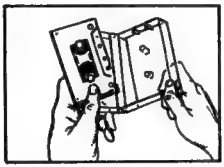

SCK!
THERE 'E IS!

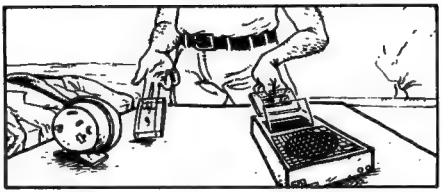
JACK!
WHO'RE YOU?
A FRIEND, JACK.
OUTTA MY WAY!
UNNNH---!
WHAT ARE YOU--A SPECTRE?
NO, JACK.

I'M FROM THE FUTURE I'M YOUR FAN!
A WHAT?
AN ADMIRER OF YOUR WORK! THERE'S A LOT OF US IN THE FUTURE!
WE'LL HELP YOU ESCAPE!
'E'S 'ERE!
YOU'RE MAD! WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME?!
DO YOU BELIEVE I'M YOUR FRIEND NOW?

HUNH? YES... YES, BUT...
I'LL TAKE YOU WHERE NO ONE WILL FIND YOU, WHERE YOU'LL BE FREE TO DO WHATEVER YOU WANT!
ONLY THE SOUL TRAVELS SO WE'LL LEAVE YOUR BODY HERE. BUT DON'T WORRY...
THE SOUL LIKE YOURS WILL EASILY WIN ANOTHER!
TO THE FUTURE, JACK!
ERVIN BLACIC & ROMEO HACIAN '93
TRRRIII TRRRIII
I HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE, RIGHT?
DEAD?
AYE. LOOK! YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHO THIS WAS!

UGH... I FEEL LIKE PUKING!
WHAT'S THIS? WHERE ARE MY HANDS?!
ALE!
WHA..? I'M A WOMAN?!
WHERE'S THAT BLOODY GHOST? I CAN'T BE A WOMAN! I DON'T WANT TO!
Gaetano Pizza
DICK & EDWARD
SNAP!
ERWIN HALLONQUIST RICHARD MCCANN



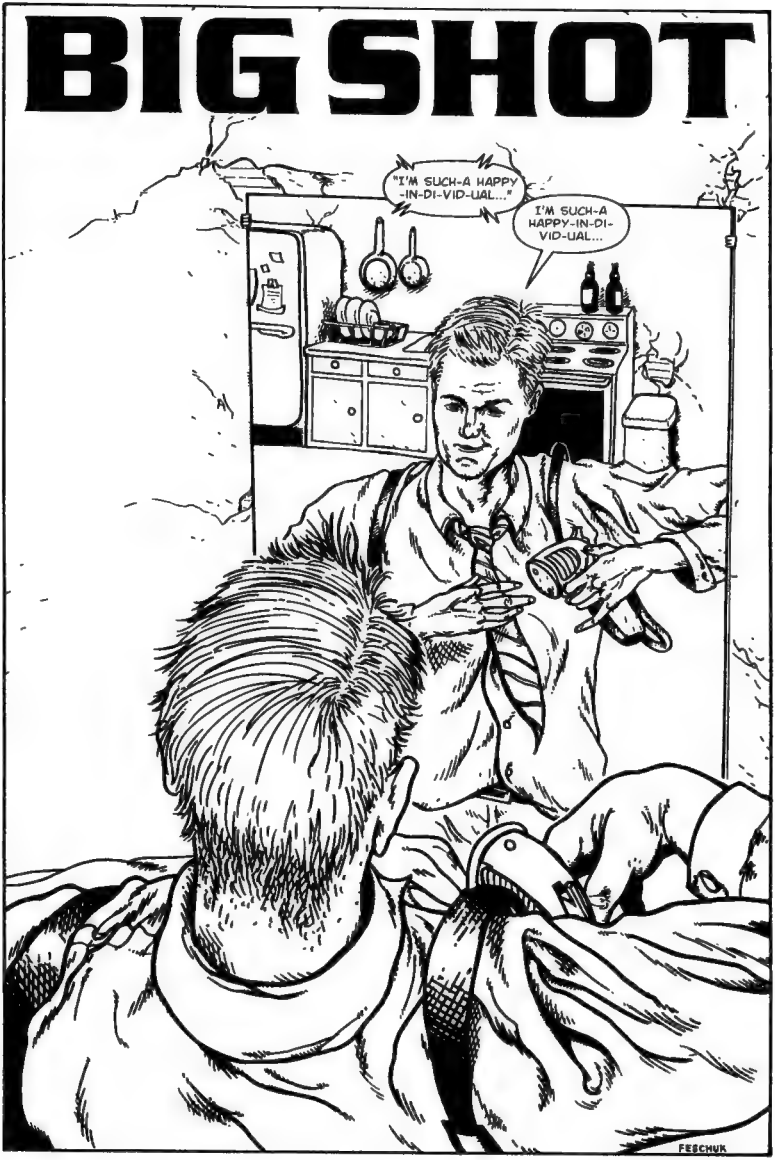


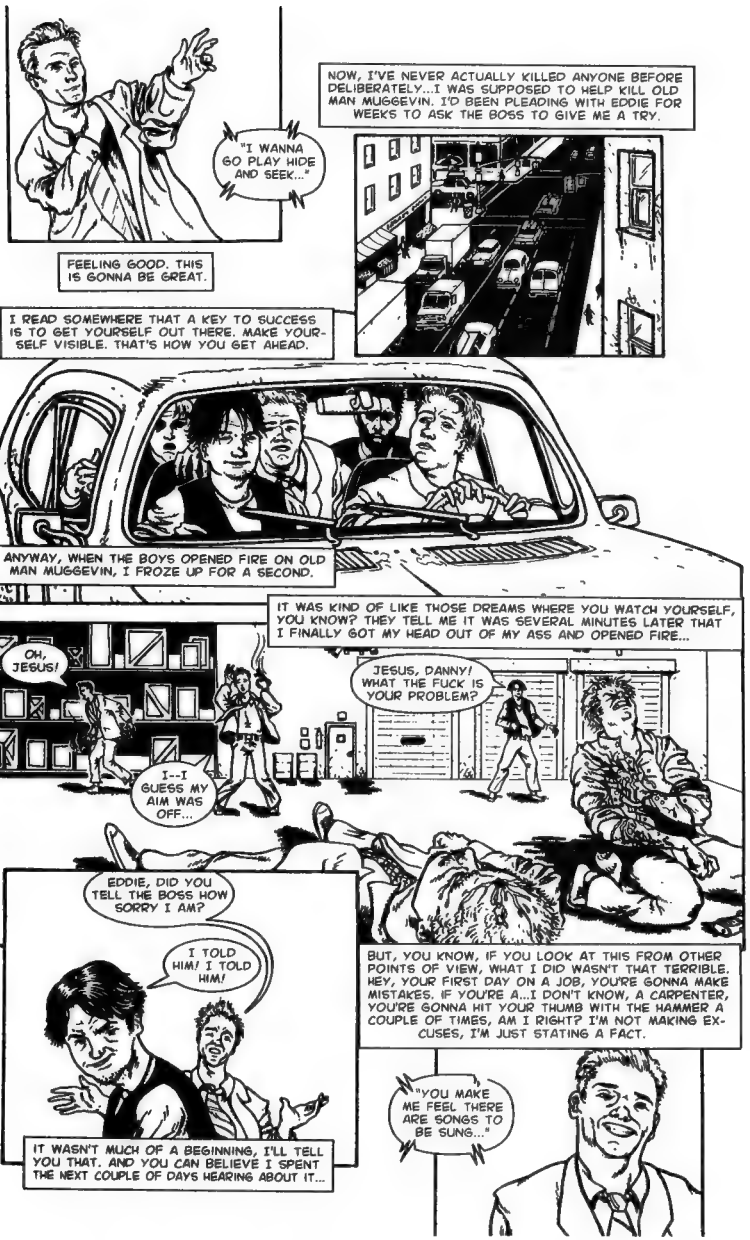
SONGS FOR SWINGIN' LOVERS
FRANK SINATRA

"YOU MAKE ME FEEL SO YOUNG..."

"...AND EVERY TIME I SEE YOU GRIN..."

BIG SHOT


"I'M SUCH-A HAPPY -IN-DI-VID-UAL..."
I'M SUCH-A HAPPY-IN-DI-VID-UAL...
FEECHUK


"I WANNA GO PLAY HIDE AND SEEK..."
FEELING GOOD. THIS IS GONNA BE GREAT.
NOW, I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY KILLED ANYONE BEFORE DELIBERATELY...I WAS SUPPOSED TO HELP KILL OLD MAN MUGGEVIN. I'D BEEN PLEADING WITH EDDIE FOR WEEKS TO ASK THE BOSS TO GIVE ME A TRY.
I READ SOMEWHERE THAT A KEY TO SUCCESS IS TO GET YOURSELF OUT THERE. MAKE YOURSELF VISIBLE. THAT'S HOW YOU GET AHEAD.
ANYWAY, WHEN THE BOYS OPENED FIRE ON OLD MAN MUGGEVIN, I FROZE UP FOR A SECOND.
IT WAS KIND OF LIKE THOSE DREAMS WHERE YOU WATCH YOURSELF, YOU KNOW? THEY TELL ME IT WAS SEVERAL MINUTES LATER THAT I FINALLY GOT MY HEAD OUT OF MY ASS AND OPENED FIRE...
OH, JESUS!
I--I GUESS MY AIM WAS OFF...
JESUS, DANNY! WHAT THE FUCK IS YOUR PROBLEM?
EDDIE, DID YOU TELL THE BOSS HOW SORRY I AM?
I TOLD HIM! I TOLD HIM!
IT WASN'T MUCH OF A BEGINNING, I'LL TELL YOU THAT. AND YOU CAN BELIEVE I SPENT THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS HEARING ABOUT IT...
BUT, YOU KNOW, IF YOU LOOK AT THIS FROM OTHER POINTS OF VIEW, WHAT I DID WASN'T THAT TERRIBLE. HEY, YOUR FIRST DAY ON A JOB, YOU'RE GONNA MAKE MISTAKES. IF YOU'RE A...I DON'T KNOW, A CARPENTER, YOU'RE GONNA HIT YOUR THUMB WITH THE HAMMER A COUPLE OF TIMES, AM I RIGHT? I'M NOT MAKING EXCUSES, I'M JUST STATING A FACT.
"YOU MAKE ME FEEL THERE ARE SONGS TO BE SUNG..."

OF COURSE, IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO SEIZE EVERY AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY...
THINK YOU CAN HANDLE IT?
OH, YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT. WE'LL MAKE THAT LITTLE BASTARD SCREAM FOR HIS MAMA.
AND NOBODY'LL KNOW?
NOBODY'LL EVEN BOTHER TO LOOK.
ONCE IN A LIFETIME, AN OPPORTUNITY COMES ALONG THAT MAKES YOU SAY, "THIS IS IT. THIS IS FOR ME." THIS WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES...
UH... PARDON ME...
I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOU BUT I COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARIN' YOU BECAUSE I WAS AT THE NEXT BOOTH OVER AND I OVERHEARD A LITTLE OF WHAT YOU GUYS WERE SAYIN' ABOUT MAKIN' SOMEBODY SCREAM FOR THEIR MAMA AND I JUST WANTED TO SAY IF YOU NEED A MAN ON THIS I'D REALLY LOVE TO DO IT...
AND...
THAT'S IT.
YOU KNOW, IT'S FUNNY, SON ...EDDIE WAS JUST TELLING ME THAT HE HAD YOU SPECIFICALLY IN MIND FOR THIS JOB...
ISN'T THAT SO, EDDIE? WEREN'T YOU JUST TELLING ME THAT?
THAT'S RIGHT, KID. I TOLD HIM ALL ABOUT YOU!
KA--
POW!
"AND EVEN WHEN I'M OLD AND GREY..."
"I'M GONNA FEEL THE WAY I DO TODAY..."
OF COURSE, THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN LUCK...THERE'S ALSO THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING EYE CONTACT...THAT HELPS MAKES YOUR PRESENTATION TRULY EFFECTIVE.
OH, YEAH. I'M READY.

"YOU...YOU MAKE ME FEEL SO YOUNG..."
EVERYTHING'S IN PLACE.
NOTHING TO DO NOW BUT PLAY THE WAITING GAME.
"FEEL SO YOUNG..."
OH YEAH. THEN IT'S OFF TO THE RACES, CHARLIE!
THIS TIME NEXT WEEK, I'LL BE ABLE TO WALK INTO ANY RESTAURANT I WANT AND SIT MYSELF RIGHT DOWN.
AND ANYONE WHO GETS IN MY WAY, I CAN TELL 'EM THINGS LIKE "GET OUT OF MY FACE" AND "MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I AM."
THIS JOB SURE HAS ITS PERKS.
COMING!
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
GOOD. DON'T APPEAR TOO ANXIOUS. KEEP A COOL DEMEANOR. MAKE 'EM THINK THEY'RE LUCKY FOR A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME.
HI, EDDIE! COME ON IN!
DANNY.
SO, WHEN DO WE GET STARTED, EDDIE?
RIGHT NOW.
HEY, HE'S USING MY NAME. GOOD SIGN. IT SUGGESTS HE'S READY TO ACCEPT ME AS A PEER.

YOU LITTLE BASTARD.
OH...
OH, MAMA.
END.
PRECHUK

ragmop presents

the covert quartet in "Spiked!"

© rob walton 1997

SEPTEMBER 1984.
GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT ON NEWS FRONT: SENATOR PAUL LAXATIVE, A CLOSE ALLY OF PRESIDENT RAYGUN, PERSUADES THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE TO HALT AN UNDERCOVER PROBE OF HIS CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTORS.
MOMMY!
LOOK, MOMMY! IT'S THAT HORRIBLE MOLLY SAVAGE ON TV AGAIN.
ALSO TONIGHT...
IS THE TASK FORCE LED BY VICE PRESIDENT BURNING-BUSH TO DEAL WITH FLORIDA'S NARCOTICS PROBLEM JUST AN EXCUSE FOR THE ISSUANCE OF GLOWING PRESS RELEASES TO ENCOURAGE A LARGE FLORIDA TURNOUT FOR THE ELECTIONS?
MOMMY, DO SOMETHING! MAKE HER GO AWAY!
MAYBE I JUST WILL!

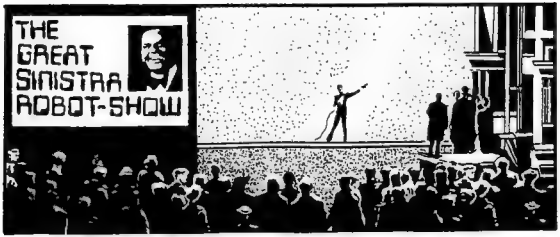
CIA HEADQUARTERS: LANGLEY VA.
GENTLEMEN; DOT... IT'S BEEN BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION THAT SOMEONE AT PBS IS ACTUALLY USING TELEVISION TO INFORM AND EDUCATE THE VIEWING PUBLIC.
WHAT? THOSE DAMN, COMMIE, PINKO ARTISTS!
I TOLD LBJ THIS WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU PUBLICALLY FUNDED T.V.?
WE ALL TOLD LBJ, FRANCOIS. WHAT CAN I SAY? LBJ LIKED TO WATCH T.V.
WHAT'S THIS BULLSHIT I HEAR ABOUT THE CONTADORA PEACE TREATY?
THE CONTRAS SAID THEY WERE GOING TO SIGN IT AND LEAVE OUR ASSES HANGIN' IN TH' WIND.
HELLO! CAN WE PLEASE PAY ATTENTION TO THE TAPE.
THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME TO DEAL WITH THE CONTRAS LATER.
"...ON EL SALVADOR, PRESIDENT RAYGUN SAID THE US WAS TRYING TO "HALT THE INFILTRATION OF AMERICA BY TERRORISTS WHO AREN'T JUST AIMING AT EL SALVADOR, BUT AT CENTRAL, SOUTH, AND NORTH AMERICA AS WELL."
PSYCHIATRISTS HAVE A NAME FOR SUCH PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY.
PARANOID SCHIZOPHRENIA!
BAM!
PERMISSION TO HANDLE THIS PERSONALLY, SIR.
OKAY...
BORDO, YOU'RE WITH ME.

SOMEWHERE IN THE BERKSHIRES, MA. NINE DAYS LATER.
IT'S OKAY, I'VE GOT THE LIGHTS.
THAT WAS A GREAT DINNER, MARY. THANK YOU. THE CHURCH ST. CAFÉ IS STILL THE BEST.
IT SEEMS LIKE AGES SINCE WE DROVE TO LENOX.
IT'S SO NICE TO SEE THE STARS AGAIN.
WE'VE GOT TO DO THIS MORE OFTEN, MOLLY.
TREAT OURSELVES, I MEAN.
YOU'RE HANDLING THE PRESSURE OF THE SHOW BEAUTIFULLY. BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO GET AWAY FROM ALL THAT AND RECHARGE.
WHAT THE...
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
I'M THE FASHION POLICE. THAT JACKET REALLY DOES NOT GO WITH THAT TIE.

MARV!
MOLLY! GET OUT OF HERE! THESE PEOPLE AREN'T THIEVES!!
AAH!
YOU THINK FREEDOM'S FREE?
DO YOU?
WHAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO CRITICIZE THE COUNTRY THAT MADE YOU WHAT YOU ARE, YOU WITH YOUR SANCTIMONIOUS MIDDLE CLASS VALUES.
IT'S ALL RIGHT FOR YOU TO SLAG THE SYSTEM ONCE YOU'VE USED IT TO MAKE YOUR MONEY.

YOU EARN A SIX FIGURE SALARY. YOU DRIVE A BMW. YOUR BOYFRIEND DRIVES A MERCEDES. YOU KEEP AN APARTMENT ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE. YOU SUMMER AT NEWBURY PORT. YOU THINK YOU PAID FOR ALL THAT?
KAK!
I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, BABY. I PAID FOR YOUR JOB, YOUR CAR, AND YOUR BILL BLASS SUITS! I PAID FOR THEM IN GREECE, TURKEY, VIETNAM, AND ANGOLA! IT WAS ME!
GUH!
I'M THE REASON THE COMMIES ARE FIGHTING THEIR WAR IN AFGHANISTAN INSTEAD OF TEXAS!
ME AND THE POLICIES OF THIS GOVERNMENT YOU FEEL ARE SO IMPORTANT TO EXPOSE!
WHOA THERE, BIG FELLA. I THINK SHE'S GOT THE MESSAGE.
GOOD EVENING. THE NEWS WORLD IS MOURNING THE DEATH OF INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER MOLLY SAVAGE, WHO DIED WHEN THE CAR SHE WAS RIDING IN OVERTURNED INTO A RAVINE. CORONERS DETERMINED THE CAUSE OF DEATH TO BE DROWNING. PERISHING WITH SAVAGE WAS MARV RICHTER, HER COMPANION OF SEVERAL YEARS. SAVAGE HAD RECENTLY OVERCOME A SEVERE DRUG ADDICTION AND WAS WORKING HARD TO RE-ESTABLISH HER CAREER.
HER REPORTS FOR "NEWS FRONT" WERE COURAGEOUS AND UNCOMPROMISING. HER VOICE WILL SURELY BE MISSED.
NOT LIKELY.
AND THEY SAY ALL THEY EVER BROADCAST IS BAD NEWS!
BE QUIET, CONSUME, AND DIE.

STRANGERS in the NIGHT
17 YEARS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. 17 YEARS ISOLATION PLANET. YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT BROUGHT ME HERE? LOVE, HATE, A BROAD. SAME OLD STORY, NOTHING NEW. HOW 'BOUT A SINGING ROBOT? WEIRD YOU SAY? YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT. WELL, HERE'S THE STORY FOR ANYONE WHO CARES TO KNOW.
GOLDEN STAR
HOSPITAL
SAFETY ZONE
ELVIS
WELL, WE ALL HEARD THE STORY HOW IN THE 21ST CENTURY EVERYTHING WENT DOWN THE DRAIN AND PEOPLE WERE CLUTCHING FOR STRAWS, SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO.
WHAT THEY FOUND WERE THE 40'S OF THE BYGONE CENTURY, ANOTHER REHASHED "GOOD OLD TIMES", WHEN HONOR AND LOYALTY STILL STOOD FOR SOMETHING, NOT LIKE TODAY.
FRANK HOLLIS '85 ©
1



AND THE PUREST EXPONENT OF ALL THIS WAS THIS HANK SINISTRA GUY, A CROONER BY TRADE. SURE, SINISTRA'S BEEN PUSHING UP THE DAISES FOR QUITE SOME TIME, BUT YOU KNOW SCIENCE CAN WORK MIRACLES. SO THEY BROUGHT OLD SINISTRA BACK FROM THE DEAD--AS AN ULTRAHUMANOID ROBOT, ALREADY SCHEDULED FOR MASS PRODUCTION.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE ROBOT TURNED OUT TO BE AN IMPRESSIVE SHOW. IMPRESSIVE ENOUGH FOR MY WIFE, MIRA--TO WHOM AFTER A SEVERE CRISIS IN OUR RELATIONSHIP, I COULDN'T REFUSE ANYTHING--TO APPROACH ME WITH A WISH.

DARLING, PLEASE BUY ME ONE OF THOSE SINGING ROBOTS.
YOU KNOW, I COMPLY WITH YOUR WISHES, BUT REMEMBER THAT THE LAST ROBOT WORKED FOR BARELY TWO WEEKS.
BUT THAT WAS AN OBSOLETE ELECTRONIC MODEL. THIS ONE'S SYNTHETIC.

LIKE I SAID, I COULDN'T REFUSE HER ANYTHING, AND SO A FEW DAYS LATER OUR OWN PRIVATE HANK SINISTRA WAS STANDING IN OUR HALL. WHAT I DISLIKED FRM THE FIRST MOMENT ON WAS HIS IMPUDENT SMIRK AND HIS PROVOKINGLY SELF-CONFIDENT WAY OF BEHAVIOR.

NOW, WAS THAT A GOOD BARGAIN?
HI, FELLA, MY NAME'S HANK AND I'M PART OF THE FAMILY FROM NOW ON.
THAT'S ONE SWELL SHEBANG, YA GOT.
FELIX HARTUS ©

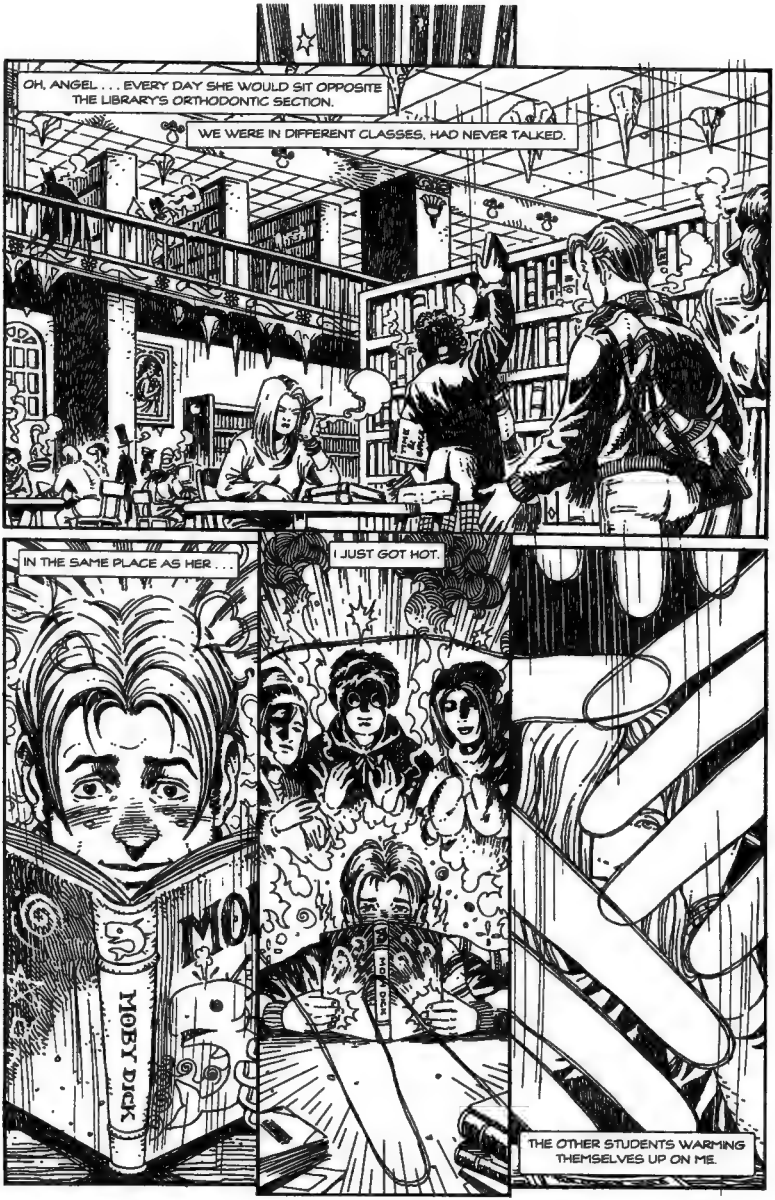
THE FOLLOWING WEEKS MY NERVES AND MY PATIENCE WERE REALLY PUT TO TRIAL. AS A FREELANCE ARTIST, I HAD MY STUDIO IN THE FLAT AND WAS EXPOSED TO THE MUSICAL TIRADES OF OUR NEW ACQUISITION IN FULL LENGTH AND VOLUME.

ALWAYS THAT SAME SONG AND THIS THING HAD NO OFF-SWITCH.
Strangers in the Night
Jeepers Creepers...
Dubi Du
Strangers in the Night
IT BECAME ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO WORK UNDER THESE CONDITIONS AS I WAS REMINDED BY LOOMING DEADLINE DOOM. BUT AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH...THERE WAS SOME NAGGING UNREST IN THE BACK OF MY MIND, DEFYING EXPLANATIONS. UNTIL ONE DAY IT ALL BECAME CLEAR TO ME, WHEN I CAME HOME EARLY FROM A BUSINESS MEETING.
THERE'S A CERTAIN POINT WHERE A MAN SIMPLY BLOWS A FUSE.
"STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT... DUBIDUBI - DU. ♫
SOMETHING MUST HAVE SNAPPED, WHEN I HEARD THE CREATIVE SINGING OF THIS SONG.
BLAMM! BLAMM!
Strang...s...i...n...th...e...Nig...h...
ONLY IN THIS MOMENT'S DESPARATION I KNEW HOW MUCH I'D LOVED MIRA. BUT THERE WAS NO GOING BACK, NO TIME FOR REGRETS. MIRA TOO HAD BECOME A VICTIM OF MY BLIND FURY. NOW THERE WAS NO TURNING BACK.

TO FOLLOW THE DREAM TO THE END, LIKE A FAMOUS WRITER OF A LONG FORGOTTEN AGE ONCE SAID.
EVEN IF IT WAS A NIGHTMARE.
A NIGHTMARE FOR ME AND--IF THERE WAS AN EQUIVALENT WHEN IT CAME TO ELECTRONIC CIRCUITRY--ESPECIALLY FOR EVERY SINISTRA ROBOT THAT FACED THE BUSINESS END OF MY .45 WUNSCH-AUTOMATIC.
I CHASED THEM EVERYWHERE AND IN ALL DISGUISES.
I WANTED TO WIPE THEM OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH.
AND WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO NOW WITH OUR LITTLE CHOIR BOY?
ER...
YOU WANT IT, YOU GET IT, CHUM.
"...FOR I WILL LOVE YOU JA! TILL I DIE.
I WAS SO EFFECTIVE THAT THE CORPORATION PUT A PRIZE ON MY HEAD. OVER 280 ROBO SNUFFS IN JUST A FEW WEEKS. SUCH A PROVOCATION COULDN'T GO UNPUNISHED.
GO GET A DECENT HAIRCUT, OFFICER.
BUT I MADE THE MISTAKE OF EVERY SUCCESSFUL OUTLAW. I GOT CARELESS. THEY RAN ME DOWN AT "ODD OLIE'S", ONE OF THOSE TYPICAL ANDROID DIVES IN THE STYLE OF THE 40'S, WHERE I'D FOUND A LOT OF MY VICTIMS. THIS TIME THEY FOUND ME AND IN REPLY TO MY GREETINGS, THE OFFICER TOLD ME MY RIGHTS.
WELL, MY RIGHTS WERE NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT WHEN THE CORPORATION WAS STAGING MY CASE AS A BIG SHOW TRIAL TO SET AN EXAMPLE. AND THE JUDGE WASN'T WHAT YOU'D CALL "WELL MEANING", SINCE YOU TERMINATED HIS ROBOT LAST WEEK.
REILLY HOBBS ©

GUILTY! HOMICIDE OF HIS WIFE AND TERMINATION OF 287 ULTRA-HUMANOID ROBOTS, TYPE SINISTRA.
IMPRESSIVE BODY COUNT.
...17 YEARS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ON AN ISOLATION PLANET.
PERFECT SILENCE? HUMANE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS? A BLESSING IN DISGUISE.
SO HERE I AM ON "MY" ISO-PLANET, ENJOYING THE SOLITUDE. BUT TODAY A SPACESHIP ARRIVED.
THEY'RE DISCHARGING SOMETHING. CAN'T SEE WHAT.
CONVICT 513966. WE HAVE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU. THE UNITED PLANETS HAVE ELECTED A NEW PRESIDENT, WHO AS A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE TO ALL PRISONERS...
...SENDS YOU A RUN-OUT MODEL "HANKIEBOY". THE PRESIDENT WISHES YOU MUCH FUN WITH YOUR SINGING ROBOT.
HELLUVA PLACE YA GOT HERE, CHUM. SAY, DO YOU KNOW THE SONG, "STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT?"
© FELIX/MARCUS

FACTS OF LIFE
MY MOTHER. THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER WHO REFUSED TO BELIEVE THAT DINOSAURS EVER EXISTED.
BONES, WHAT DO BONES SAY ?
BECOMING INCREASINGLY INFLEXIBLE AS TIME GOES ON, WITH SOME RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE. MY MOTHER ALRIGHT.
THE FISH I WON ON THE DAY THE NAIL (WHICH KEEPS THE COCONUT FIRMLY IN PLACE) MUSTVE COME LOOSE.
LEAVING ME, PATRICK HILL, AT YOUR SERVICE. THE ARCHETYPICAL VILLAGE IDIOT TURNED STUDENT. STILL IN THE COCOON ON THE PERIPHERY OF REAL LIFE.
STILL VERY MUCH THE MOTHERS BOY.
ANGEL.
WHOM I COVETED, THOUGH NOT IN A SERIAL KILLER TYPE OF WAY. MY INTENTIONS BEING, AT ALL TIMES, AS PURE AS THE DRIVEN SNOW.
AND THE LIBRARY, NOT A PERSON, BUT AS REAL A THING AS ANY ID ENCOUNTERED AT THAT POINT IN TIME.
THE LIBRARY HAD BEEN TOLD TO CUT COSTS; ITS HEATING WAS THE FIRST TO GO. ON ENTRY, NO RESPITE FROM THE FREEZING COLD THEN.


OH, ANGEL . . . EVERY DAY SHE WOULD SIT OPPOSITE THE LIBRARY'S ORTHODONTIC SECTION.
WE WERE IN DIFFERENT CLASSES. HAD NEVER TALKED.
IN THE SAME PLACE AS HER . . .
MOBY DICK
I JUST GOT HOT.
MOBY DICK
THE OTHER STUDENTS WARMING THEMSELVES UP ON ME.

AT AN EARLY AGE . .
MY MOTHER SUMMONED ME.
IT'S TIME, PATRICK. IT'S TIME I TOLD YOU THE FACTS OF LIFE.
SEE THE GOLDFISH ? PRETEND THE TOP ONE IS THE DADDY. THE OTHER, THE MUMMY.
BUT THE FISH WERE SWIMMING IN AND OUT, TOP TO BOTTOM; SWITCHING PLACES AS THEY WENT THEIR WAY AROUND THE TANK.
Ploop !
I COULDN'T CONCENTRATE PROPERLY . . . NOT ON MY MOTHER'S WORDS . . . NOT ON THE DADDY . . .OR WAS IT THE MUMMY FISH !
MY FORMATIVE YEARS. RELAYING THE WRONG PIECES OF INFORMATION AT THE WRONG TIME. HOT AND BOTHERED AND EXPANDING OUT IN ALL SORTS OF WAYS. PUTTING DOWN MY FIRST WET DREAM . . .
TO GOLDFISH.

AND NOW, POST FLASHBACK, ANGEL WAS GETTING UP FROM HER TABLE. OH GOD! OH GOD!
I GATHERED MYSELF.
(MY MOTHER, SHE USED THE FISH FOR A REASON. THEY WERE PART OF THE FAMILY, I SUPPOSE, AND THEY WEREN'T GENITALIA-BASED. I GUESS MOTHER COULDN'T COPE WITH THE IDEA OF ACKNOWLEDGING THE EXISTENCE OF DANGLING HAIRY BITS, NO MATTER THE CONTEXT.)
YOU SEE, THIS TIME I WAS DETERMINED . . .
EYUH !
(I AM THAT MAN. THE MAN WHO WAS TAUGHT THE FACTS OF LIFE USING GOLDFISH.)
TO SAY SOMETHING TO HER . . .
(AND WHEN IT COMES TO THE OPPOSITE SEX, THAT'S HOW I RATIONALISE THINGS.)
ANYTHING . . . !
Ploop !

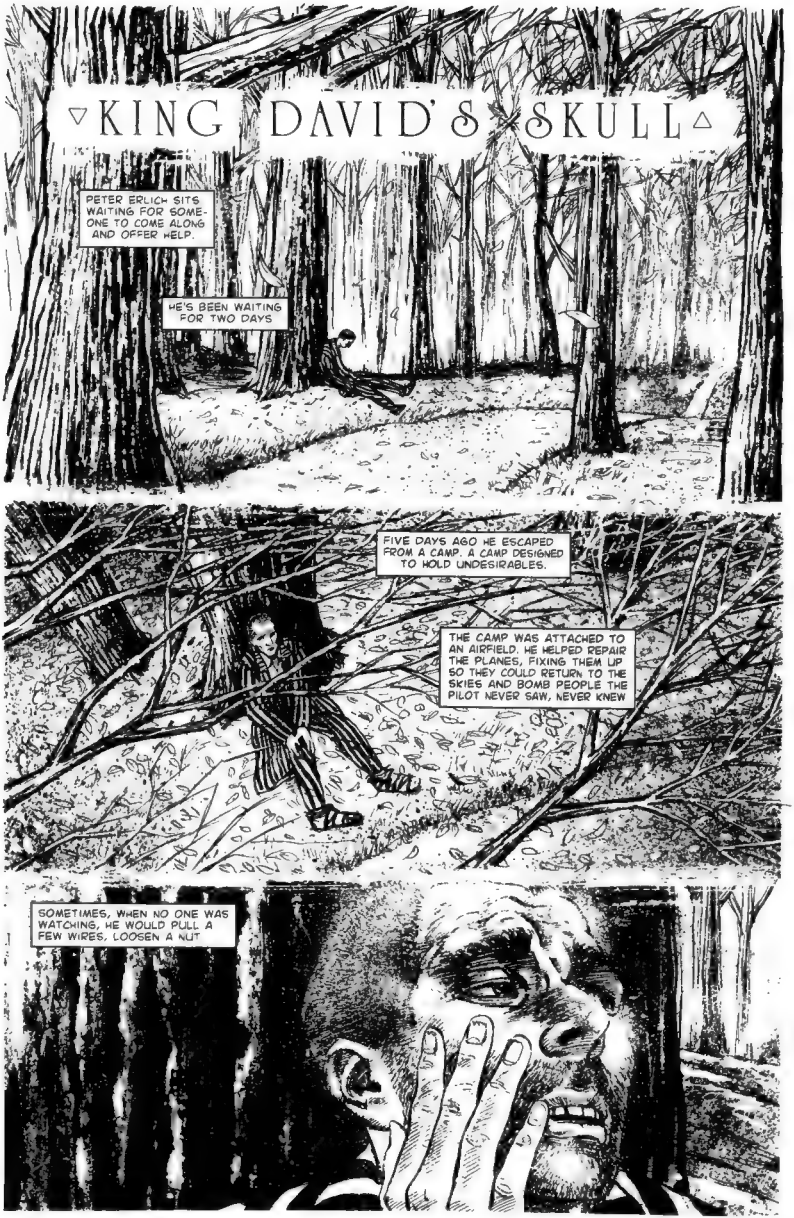
IT'S SOME YEARS ON AND WE HAVE A BOUNCING BABY BOY NOW, MYSELF AND ANGEL.
Gurgle
THAT'S MY MOTHER WITH PATRICK JNR. SHE MUST SEEM HUGE TO THE LITTLE MITE.
Koochie-Koo
I KNOW HOW THE POOR KID FEELS.
ME AND ANGEL. WE TALK A LOT. AND HAVE DONE EVER SINCE THAT FATEFUL DAY AT THE LIBRARY. OUR FIRST AWKWARD CONVERSATION AND THE USUAL LEADS-EVENTUALLY-TO-MARRIAGE STUFF.
WE TALK OF OUR HOPES AND FEARS AND THE BRINGING UP OF PATRICK JNR., WHICH I HAVE TO ADMIT I HAVE STRONG VIEWS ON. I'VE ALREADY SUSSED THE EXPLAINING OF THE FACTS OF LIFE, YOU KNOW, WHEN THE KID IS READY.
I'M HAVING AN AQUARIUM FITTED MONDAY NEXT. THE PHILOSOPHY BEING THIS: IF IT WORKED FOR ME, IT'LL WORK FOR JNR.
YOU GOT A BETTER SUGGESTION ?
SCHMARK !

WRITER : JIM ALEXANDER ARTIST : JON HAWARD
LETTERING : STUART McCALLUM
© 1996

FIN

...BEATS ONE.
ROUND ANOTHER...
...HE SHOOTS.
DAMN.
If you go down to the woods TODAY
AAAAAA
©1996 GRAEME NEIL REID

AAAAAAAAA
AAAHH
...DON'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS, BUT IT GRABBED ME. AND I WAS TRYING TO MOVE...
WHATS THAT?
um...
IN!


KING DAVID'S SKULL
PETER ERLICH SITS WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO COME ALONG AND OFFER HELP.
HE'S BEEN WAITING FOR TWO DAYS
FIVE DAYS AGO HE ESCAPED FROM A CAMP. A CAMP DESIGNED TO HOLD UNDESIRABLES.
THE CAMP WAS ATTACHED TO AN AIRFIELD. HE HELPED REPAIR THE PLANES, FIXING THEM UP SO THEY COULD RETURN TO THE SKIES AND BOMB PEOPLE THE PILOT NEVER SAW, NEVER KNEW
SOMETIMES, WHEN NO ONE WAS WATCHING, HE WOULD PULL A FEW WIRES, LOOSEN A NUT

AS SOON AS THE TRAIN HAD LEFT POLAND, HE KNEW WHERE THEY WERE GOING. THE OTHERS PRETENDED OTHERWISE, BUT HE HAD HEARD THE STORIES AND BELIEVED THEM.
DURING THE LONG JOURNEY, HE FORCED HIMSELF TO ABANDON HIS OLD LIFE. HIS YEARS AS A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, HIS WIFE, HIS CHILDREN; THEY WERE ALL GONE.
ERASED FROM HIS MIND.
TIME MEANT NOTHING WHERE THEY WERE GOING. HE WAS A SMART MAN: HOURS, DAYS, MINUTES, SECONDS. THEY WOULD ALL BLEND INTO ONE LONG BLUR.
IT WOULD BE BETTER NOT TO KNOW, NOT TO KEEP TRACK.
HE WAS BORN AGAIN THAT DAY IN AUSCHWITZ FOUR YEARS AGO. THE MAN HE ONCE WAS HAD BEEN STRIPPED FROM HIM AND HE LET IT GO.
IT WAS THE ONLY WAY.

HE REMEMBERS HOW COLD THE RAIN WAS THAT DAY
PETER ERLICH LIVED THERE FOR ALMOST A YEAR, AND THEN WAS TRANSFERRED. HE WAS FAIRLY HEALTHY AND THEY KNEW HE WAS SMART.
COUGH COUGH
HE WOULD BE ABLE TO SERVE THEM BETTER AS AN AIRPLANE MECHANIC.
HE WORKED HARD, NEVER FOUGHT, NEVER QUESTIONED
BLAM
AND THEN ONE DAY THE PLANES CAME AND HE WAS FREE.

THE DAYS AND NIGHTS WENT SO FAST, HE COULD BARELY KEEP TRACK.
HE REMEMBERS KILLING A MOUSE, EATING IT RAW.
AND THEN HE TRIPPED AND HIS LEG SNAPPED, JUST BENEATH THE KNEE.
HE RAN ALL NIGHT, TERRIFIED THAT IT WAS ALL A DREAM AND HE WOULD WAKE UP AND FIND HIMSELF BACK IN HIS BUNK, A GUARD AT THE DOOR, A SPOTLIGHT SWEEPING THE COMPLEX, LOOKING FOR ANYONE TRYING TO ESCAPE
LOOKING BACK, HE WISHES THAT HE COULD REMEMBER WHO HE WAS, WHAT HIS LIFE HAD BEEN LIKE
THERE ARE SOME MEMORIES, OF COURSE, BUT THEY ARE TOO VAGUE, TOO FADED TO BE UNDERSTOOD, OR TO HAVE ANY MEANING.
HE THINKS THAT MAYBE HE WAS WRONG, THAT SURVIVAL WASN'T THE MOST IMPORTANT THING AFTER ALL.
THERE ARE THINGS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIVING, HE NOW KNOWS. THINGS ONE MUST NEVER GIVE UP:
LOVE, FAMILY, FRIENDS. WHEN HE FORGOT THEM, HE LOST HIMSELF

AND THAT IS HIS ONLY REGRET
HE IS THIRSTY.
Jude

END.

PATTY CAKE
IN
"SHAKEN UP"
I KNOW YOU'RE SITTIN' THERE WAITIN' TO GROSS ME OUT, SOSE. BUT FERGIT IT. YA CAN'T GROSS ME OUT. I'M UNGROSSABLE.
SUUUU
BOY, PATTY-CAKE - DON'T YA WISH THAT WAS A NICE OLIVE MILKSHAKE WITH TURKEY GIBLITS? HMMMM?
GROSS
ZOOM
WELL, I DON'T THINK SHE'LL BE FINISHING THIS BAD BOY, SO I'LL—
-I-UM
UH
I GROSSED MYSELF OUT ON THAT ONE
YOOM

G. ALLAN HOLCOMB

CIAO, BABY

MIKE PERKINS

THE SILVER CITY.
THE DAWN OF EVIL.

I CAST THEE OUT, MORNINGSTAR.

LOOK OUT BELOW!!

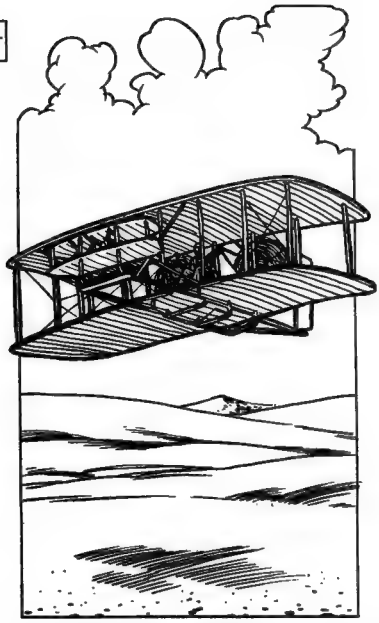
THE ISLE OF CRETE.
THE DAWN OF CIVILIZATION.
DON'T GET QUITE SO HIGH.
Come Closer.

CRINKLE, YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THAT.

It's Too Late Now. Besides, He Doesn't Pay Attention.
As Long As You Don't Draw Attention to Yourself He Won't Notice.

I've Waited Millenia For Him To Heal Me.
I've Helped Myself!

KITTY HAWK, NORTH CAROLINA.
THE DAWN OF FLIGHT.



Man has flown. They can rise above the Earth!

I'll Just Have To Fly Higher.

BAIKONOR SPACE CENTER. ZVEZDEY GORODK (SPACE CITY) USSR.
THE DAWN OF SPACE TRAVEL.

Man has left the Earth!!

I'll Just Have To Fly Higher.

What were we told a few thousand years ago?
DO NOT BURN YOURSELF.
"DO NOT GET CLOSE TO THE SUN.
LISTEN TO THE FATHER!
Stay Grounded.
!
I AM ALWAYS WATCHING.
WHEN YOU CHOOSE TO PUNISH YOURSELF I ALLOW IT.
LOOK OUT BELOW!!
THE END OF CRENWINKLE THE ANGEL.

LETTERS

Internet: 72164.1134@compuserve or calcomic@aol.com
225 N. Sheldon Rd., Plymouth, MI 48170

Olav Beemer
Zeist, The Netherlands

Dear Joe,

What an insane past two weeks these have been. It's probably another weird twist in the distribution chain, especially during the holiday season and all, but I nevertheless was pretty amazed to find two issues of NEGATIVE BURN hit the racks within a week of one another. Two big issues within seven days— I rest assured that you can imagine how busy I must have been reading these two issues from cover to cover in one sitting. Here are my comments on Negative Burn #40.

"The Brutalizers," part three, didn't much improve on last issue's installment, I'm afraid. Somehow, the storytelling lacks the substance it would have needed to turn it into a highly fascinating piece of work. Granted, Dave Braysher and Mike Perkins' artwork looks well enough, but it simply can't save the storyline itself from falling victim to a lack of substance. Fortunately, "Mr. Mamoulian" managed to more than make up for the disappointing first feature of the issue. This definitely was one of Brian Bolland's most hilarious! Great job once more.

"Suzi Romaine" was one of the better installments of the whole issue, especially in the artwork department. I've said it before and I'll say it again, it's so wonderful to see old artwork from Ted Slampyak. I've adored his open and crisp art ever since I first laid my eyes on it some two years ago and it's thrilling to see his work being showcased here. Somebody had better give this man some book to draw again, because I really miss him after his last monthly comic book series got put on hold. Perhaps a Caliber comic book?

"The Big Date," well, it was fun, plain and simple. There wasn't really anything novel to Fred van Lente's story, but it managed to make me laugh and since it bordered on the absurd, I took it in and simply enjoyed it without thinking too much about it. Steve Ellis' artwork looked fabulous, being very dynamic and perfectly suited for a funny tale like this one. "The Tale of the Six-Legged Octopi," on the other hand, wasn't my cup of tea. In other words, I'll pass on this one.

I won't pass on "Rib," though. Produced in the already classic style that blends a realistic background with a cartoony main character (the style that has made books like CEREBUS and BONE so popular), this really was quite a treat for me. Especially since the story itself turned out to be more than I had expected. A nice moral, a solid ending, fine story-telling and interesting artwork. This one surely had it all. Thumbs up to Andrew Ford and Michael Kelleher. Unfortunately, one installment later in the issue, I found I had to pass on "Choke!" This just isn't my idea of a good read, I guess.

"The Ignorant Layman" has made it to its third chapter and still I don't know what exactly to think of it. The artwork is so different each page that I somehow fail to form a really solid opinion on it, and the story-line seems to be somewhat non-sequitur in some places. Even upon the final page of this concluding chapter, I'm still not sure. What is for sure, though, is that is was a weird tale! Luckily, "Mr. Murray" was as powerful as always, so this compensates the slight disappointment from "The Ignorant Layman" in a fashion quite nicely.

"The Victim" was extremely intriguing a read. Gregg Kendrick's story was slightly convoluted at times, but overall, it turned out to be a fascinating piece nevertheless and as always, I've thoroughly enjoyed Philip Xavier's artwork. In a way, it reminds me of early Jim Lee art, but with a slightly different overall mood to it. It would be nice if we could see more of his work in these pages to see in what direction his style will evolve as he gains experience.

Finally, "The Meaning of Life" was another fine piece of work by Stephen Cheng, which I really have liked. Being both funny and a tad ironic, this one fit right in with the usual type of stories presented in this book. "Bedrock Blues," I'm afraid, didn't really. Ending the issue with such short and hardly substantial tales might not be the wisest of moves, as has been expressed before in the lettercol, so I'm going to pass on this one, too.

All in all, NEGATIVE BURN #40 turned out to be a good issue anyway. Variety is the spice of life, and if there's one thing this issue offered, it was a nice variety. Keep it up.

Like the previous issue, NEGATIVE BURN #41 turned out to be one of the better issues from the past several months. The reasons for me coming to this conclusion are quite simple. The issue at hand contained a number of high-quality short stories which have really been able to entertain me, and since that's what this book is all about, I know I can say you're doing a fine job.

The opening tale, though, wasn't all that interesting. "Iron Empires" has reached its fifth installment but the presented storyline has lost its grip on me ever since the second chapter. While Christopher Moeller's artwork really does look good and is perfectly balanced, Kevin Moeller's tale is beginning to be a tad irritating. I've had my fill of the "joe giff me liddle girl" type of dialogue and since there seems to be not much of a real plot around, I'm glad this one will come to a conclusion two issues

from now. This issue's "Mr. Mamoulian" fortunately was a barrel of laughs again. It's nice to see these short one-page tales creating some sort of continuity and this one really was fun!

"Cubicle Rut" by Stephen Cheng absolutely was the very best story in this issue, by far. Actually, I've been enjoying this twelve-page piece of work so incredibly much that I even think this should be regarded as the very best feature from the past year or so. Stephen Cheng has already delivered some interesting pieces of work in the past, but this was a crowning achievement. Wonderful storytelling, powerful artwork and a very satisfactory conclusion. I have really enjoyed this a lot and hope to see a lot more of Stephen's work in future issues.

'Mime Story" was nice, much to my surprise. Most of the time, "Mr. Mamoulian" and "Mr. Murray" are the only one-page features that I really enjoy, whereas the others simply fail to entertain me, but this one did the trick nevertheless. "The Immortals" ended up being a rather offbeat tale by Darko Macan and Edvin Biukovic. This is so unlike anything I have seen from them thus far, but I liked it a lot and especially the twist near the end of the tale was priceless.

I didn't much care for "The Covet Quartet." While the artwork by Rob Walton definitely was good, being a bit similar in its style to that of Randy Reynaldo, the story itself kind of let me down. "Comics to Bore and Confuse You" more than made up for that. Especially the first three pages were amazingly entertaining, pulling out all the possible comic book clichés one could think of, and the ending was a stroke of genius. Nice work by Jesse Hamm.

"Fix" sure was one of the stranger stories in these pages. When I started to read it, I actually didn't expect much of it because neither the artwork nor the storytelling looked really inspired, but by the time I was sinking my teeth into the tale, it really came to life. A depressing story, sure, but it was very well-told and portrayed in an effective fashion. Thumbs up on this one.

"Carla Allison" also ended up being a rather enjoyable feature. John McCrea's early work continues to amaze me and the presented story actually was a brilliant study in anti-climaxes.

"Mr. Drawing Board Belly" wasn't my cup of tea, although the artwork looked nice enough. It simply failed to grasp my undivided attention. "The Brutalizers," to round things off, wasn't all that powerful an installment either. Somehow, I don't think this comic book series works well when it comes to presenting multi-part stories. Sticking to the one-part tales is a much better solution, and even if once in a while a longer tale comes across your desk, just print it in one issue. As I've said before, I would like to see a twenty-page story once in a while— I really wouldn't mind.

In short, Negative Burn #41 did contain two or three uninteresting pieces, but the quality of the other stories was convincing enough to make me come to the aforementioned conclusion that this was one of the better issues of this book.

Well, Olav, as always you've done a great job covering all the shorts from the previous couple of issues.

I'm glad you like Stephen Cheng's work. I'm not sure how much more we'll be seeing him in the pages of NEGATIVE BURN though, as I'm working with him on perhaps doing his own series. More on this as information becomes available. I, for one, think Stephen has the chance to break through and find himself a strong following. He's a very talented young man.

Since you liked "Mime Story," I might suggest you check out Andy Kuhn's work over on Erik Larsen's FREAK FORCE series. He's doing some excellent work on that title.

Also, be sure to check out Andrew Ford and Michael Kelleher's RIB, debuting this May from Caliber Comic. There's a reason a lot of people are talking about this series.

Sorry you didn't like Rob Walton's "The Covet Quartet" from issue #41. Hopeufily, you'll enjoy this issues episode a little bit better.

Rick Klaw
Managing Editor, Mojo Press
rick_kla@eden.com

Joe,

Finally got around to reading NB #41. A wonderful issue. One of your best.

Good stories include:

"Cubicle Rut"— The art was workmanlike but the story was entertaining.

"Comics To Bore & Confuse You" was clever if a bit overlong.

"Fix"— Another decent story with better-than-average art. Like the fact that a potentially preachy story was just a tale.

"The Covert Quartet" was vintage Rob Walton. I've been a big fan of RAGMOP since it's inception.

And the best story in the issue:

"The Immortals"- Beautifully drawn and very well written. Wish I had this one around when I was putting together WEIRD BUSINESS. I'll remember this story around awards time.

Congrats on a great issue and hope to talk to you soon.

Thanks, Rick. Everyone should look forward to seeing Rick working with artist John Lucas—another talented young artist; where do they keep coming from?—in issue #47. It's a bizarre, crazy story that's sure to leave you laughing. John also supplied a beautiful cover for the issue.

Well, guys, after 46 issues of monthly publication, I find myself in the unexpected position of announcing that the next issue of NEGATIVE BURN won't be on sale for two months. Gasp! That's right, due to a number of different reasons, I'll be taking NB to a bi-monthly basis. Don't worry, it's not the end of the world. You'll still be getting the best of new and established talent in every 64 page issue, just not on as regular a basis. Hey, you could look at it as a way to spend the $3.95 you normally reserve for NB each month and try out another excellent title in the Caliber line. There's a lot of quality series and projects being put out by Caliber so give them a shot. I'm sure there's something there for everyone.

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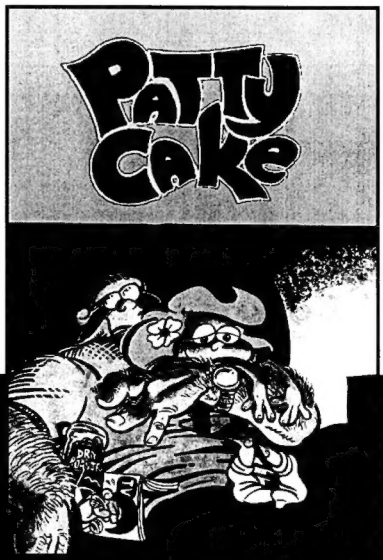
Meet PATTY CAKE

What is Patty Cake? We'll let J. Torres of Indy Magazine describe it for you...

"Patty Cake has fast become one of my favorite comics these days. Take li'l Jinx and give her some attitude, maybe infuse Calvin and Hobbes with a bit more of an edge, combine Rend and Stimpy with Peanuts, and you have somewhat of an idea what this book has in store."



Wizard magazine says of Patty Cake... "Roberts' cartooning is delightful...it captures the naïve playfulness and harmless intensity of a child's perspective."

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